

REACH



Umatilla Chemical
Disposal Outreach Office
190 East Main Street
Hermiston, Oregon 97838
(541) 564-9339

Outreach Office Hours
Monday–Friday
8:30 a.m.–5 p.m.
Other hours by appointment

Umatilla Chemical Disposal Outreach Office

1st Quarter, Winter 2002

The Final Mission

Sixty years ago, German armies occupied most of Europe and were pushing toward Russia, Africa and the Middle East. Japanese forces were conquering parts of Asia and the Pacific. Within weeks, on “a day that will live in infamy,” they would attack the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor.

In that atmosphere of tension and uncertainty, the Army opened the Umatilla Ordnance Depot on Oct. 14, 1941.

“Ordnance,” as some locals from Hermiston still call it, played an important role in supporting the war effort and every subsequent U.S. military action through Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

In 1962, the Cold War gave the Umatilla Chemical Depot a new mission—the storage of chemical weapons. With the depot beginning its seventh decade, we are within sight of its final mission—the safe disposal of those weapons.

Completed in August 2001, the Umatilla Chemical Agent Disposal Facility stands among the most advanced industrial facilities in the world and ranks as the largest environmental cleanup effort in Oregon history.



“THE ZERO BOYS”

UTILITIES BRANCH SAFETY COMMITTEE.
0-FREQUENCY RATE FOR LAST 3 MONTHS.
(91,995 M.H. EXPOSURE)
DETERMINED TO WORK SAFELY FOR VICTORY.
UMATILLA ORDNANCE DEPOT-HERMISTON, OREGON.
1 NOVEMBER 1943.

Employees celebrate a safety award at the Umatilla Ordnance Depot in November 1943. The depot, which opened in 1941 shortly before the U.S. entry into World War II, celebrated its 60th anniversary during 2001.

The safety of the communities, workers and the environment is our highest priority, and we are working in partnership with you to make our community free from the legacy of chemical weapons.

“The long anticipated boom struck with full force this week when word was received the government had approved construction of 83 houses within Hermiston.”

Depot Headlines

Headlines and news coverage from the Hermiston Herald newspaper describing the first year of the Umatilla Chemical Depot:

Nov. 14, 1940: First news article on the depot appears, describing rumors of a munitions depot west of Hermiston. The Hermiston Reclamation Building and Umatilla Electric offices were used as the first offices.

Nov. 21, 1940: Capt. Williams arrives to take charge of the depot with 600 ammunition storage igloos planned.

Jan. 11, 1941: The U.S. government files suit to acquire by condemnation 4,640 acres of land. These include 3,760 acres from Morrow County, 640 from Umatilla County, 160 from Western Irrigation Company and 80 from residents Marie Alice and John Hanson. Government appraisers estimate the total acreage named in the four suits to be worth \$6,620.

Feb. 6, 1941 headline: “J.A. Terteling of Boise awarded contract for igloos, depot estimated cost \$7,547,661.”

Feb. 27, 1941: Stores print advertisements welcoming Capt. Williams and J.A. Terteling.

March 6, 1941: Work begins. W.G. Kershberger tells of school problems due to influx of students.

March 27, 1941: “The long anticipated boom struck with full force this week when word was received the government had approved construction of 83 houses within Hermiston.”

April 24, 1941 headline: “Depot commander arrives” (Capt. Percy)

May 29, 1941: First dust storm hits project.

July 3, 1941 headline: “War drums sound in Germany. Business booms and works speeds up at Ordnance.” War Department adds \$3,145,821 to construction project.

Aug. 7, 1941: Ninety-eight igloos completed with ideal weather; 3,000 men make every effort to complete their task. Each igloo costs the government \$8,500.

Sept. 4, 1941: Oregon Journal features Hermiston as “hot spot of Northwest.” One million dollars a month payroll, 10,000 extra people in a town of 800 dazed by the war boom. F.C. McKenzie, mayor and town’s principal hardware merchant, takes time out to work on tough city problems.



Employees work with ammunition handling equipment at Umatilla Ordnance Depot.

Sept. 11, 1941: Records fall. Fourteen igloos built in 24-hour period.

Sept. 24, 1941: Twenty-four igloo arches poured in 24 hours.

Nov. 2, 1941: Three lose life at hands of youthful gun killer.

Nov. 6, 1941: Thousandth igloo poured. Quote: “It’s all over. Even the shouting. The last igloo at the Umatilla Ordnance Depot was poured Thursday morning at 3:30 a.m.”



Keeping Memories Alive

HERMISTON—The Umatilla Chemical Depot's "good old days" live on through a club that meets twice a month in Hermiston. On the second and fourth Saturdays, a group of retired depot employees meets at 9:00 a.m. for breakfast at the Pheasant Cafe.

"It's a social thing, to have fun and keep in touch," said Fay Moses of Hermiston, who worked at the depot for nearly 30 years. "We look forward to it." Moses began working at the depot during World War II and later returned to work in the accounting office after her children were old enough for school. She got involved in the club after she retired in 1983.

The group started meeting in the early 1970s when a large layoff occurred due to a transfer of jobs to Tooele, Utah.

Typically, anywhere from six to 12 people attend, with members ranging in age up to 101-year-old Mabel Corliss of Stanfield.

"Anybody who ever worked (at the depot) is welcome, as well as current employees," said Moses, who can be contacted at (541)-567-5108.



Workers unload bombs in open storage at Umatilla Ordnance Depot.

"Anybody who ever worked (at the depot) is welcome, as well as current employees."



Depot firemen are shown in this photograph from 1944. The depot fire station is still in use today to protect the 19,600-acre installation.



Depot Commanders

HERMISTON—Hal Echols grew up in Texas and California and moved 19 times in his 22 years of military service. But among all his choices, he picked Hermiston as the place to live once he retired.

Prior to serving as the Umatilla commander from August 1973 to July 1974, Echols had been assigned to duty in Georgia, Kansas, Hawaii, Germany and Vietnam during his Army career in armor and ordnance.

"I asked for the assignment here at Umatilla because a good friend had been stationed here," Echols said. "He said it was a nice place. I had just returned from Vietnam, and I needed a place to enjoy."

After Umatilla, Echols was promoted to full colonel and moved on to a new assignment

in California. Before leaving, he and his wife purchased land in rural Hermiston's Minnehaha district with the idea of living there permanently when his Army career ended. "Hermiston was a nice, small town that didn't look like it would grow into a metropolitan area. We had kids and liked the people."

When they returned to Hermiston in 1975, they built a home and Echols started a second career in construction. He worked in construction for 20 years before permanently retiring.

"We still love Hermiston and think it's a great place to live."

Other commanders living in the Hermiston area include:

- Chuck Norris, commander from 1969 to 1971, who worked in real estate and served in the Oregon House of Representatives.
- Guy Lovelace, commander from 1978 to 1980, who returned to Umatilla to work as Washington Demilitarization Company's quality control/quality assurance manager at the Umatilla Chemical Agent Disposal Facility.
- Marie Baldo, commander from 1995 to 1997, who works as a Umatilla city librarian and is a member of the Hermiston City Council.



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